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INFORMATION NOTE

on Non-Governmental Organizations and the United Nations

DIRECTORATE GENERAL FOR COMMITTEES
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Introduction

According to the Charter of the United Nations, membership of the United Nations is open to 'peace loving states which accept the obligations contained in the present Charter and, in the judgement of the organization, are able and willing to carry out these obligations'.

The United Nations is a governmental organization linking states and their governments.

Article 57 governs the relations of the United Nations 'with the various specialist agencies, established by intergovernmental agreement and having wide international responsibilities, as defined in their basic instruments in economic, social, cultural, education, health and related fields'. Article 63 gives the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) the responsibility of defining the terms of the relationship between such agencies and the United Nations, subject to the General Assembly's approval. Subsequent articles permit ECOSOC to invite members of such agencies to participate without vote in the work of concern to them.

ECOSOC Resolutions of 27 February 1950 (288(X)) and 25 June 1968 (1296(XLIV)), serve to identify governmental organizations more clearly.

Resolution 288(X) concerns the implementation of Article 71 of the United Nations Charter on consultative status of non-governmental organizations. It states,

'Any international organization which is not established by an intergovernmental agreement shall be considered as a non-governmental organization for the purpose of these arrangements'.

Resolution 1296(XLIV) amplifies this:

'...including organizations which accept members designated by government authorities, providing that such membership does not interfere with the free expression of views of the organizations'.

Non-Governmental Organizations

Article 71 of the United Nations Charter concerns the relations of the United Nations with non-governmental organizations.

'The Economic and Social Council may make suitable arrangements for consultation with non-governmental organizations which are concerned with matters within its competence. Such arrangements may be made with international organizations and, where appropriate, with national organizations after consultation with the member of the United Nations concerned'.

The Union of International Associations has published regularly a 'Yearbook of International Organizations' which is accepted by ECOSOC as a source document of such non-governmental organizations. This Yearbook describes seven aspects distinguishing international non-governmental organizations from others:

- (1) the aims of the organization, which must be genuinely international in character and cover operations in at least three countries;
- (2) the members. There must be individual or collective participation with full voting rights from at least three countries;
- (3) the organization's structure must be formal giving to members the right periodically to elect governing bodies and authorities;
- (4) member countries should participate as officers in the organization from time to time;
- (5) substantial financial contributions to the organization's budget must come from at least three countries. There must be no attempt to make profits for distribution to members;
- (6) organizations may have relations with others, but should lead an independent life and elect their own officers;
- (7) evidence of current activities must be available.

Under the Rules of Consultative Status determined by ECOSOC, non-governmental organizations are required to present four-yearly reports on activities, particularly on their contribution to the fulfillment of the United Nations Charter. The ECOSOC Non-Governmental Organizations Committee has to examine these reports to ensure that rules have been applied and that no 'systematic, political, motivated and unsubstantiated attacks against Member States of the United Nations' have been committed by such organizations that are accorded consultative status.

Examples of Non-Governmental Organizations with Consultative Status

Amnesty International¹ has consultative status (category 2) with the ECOSOC.

¹ The new address of Amnesty International in London is:
10 Southampton Street, London. WC2E 7HF, Telephone: 01-836 7788.
The address of Amnesty International in New York is:
2112 Broadway, New York, NY 100 23, Telephone: (212) 7878 906.

This organization was founded in 1961 with the aims of mobilizing public opinion to introduce effective international machinery to guarantee freedom of speech and of religion as stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, work for the release for men and women imprisoned for their beliefs, and for the release where necessary of their families. It has an annual International Council meeting in which representatives of the thirty three national sections meet. It's **f**inances are raised by individual contributions, covenants and grants from foundations and contributions from these national sections.

Its activities include preparing an index of prisoners of conscience, investigating conditions under which prisoners are held, forming local groups undertaking to work for the release of at least three prisoners, organizing missions of enquiry to countries where human rights are in jeopardy, sending observers to attend political trials and organizing international conferences on issues of particular concern.

The organization estimates that it has close to one hundred thousand members throughout the world who not only contribute financially, but in many cases participate actively to create public awareness and to put pressure on those governments who violate fundamental human rights.

Besides having consultative status with ECOSOC, it also has such status with UNESCO, the Council of Europe, the Organization of African Unity, and the Organization of American States.

